

POR

ROAD ACCIDENTS IN PORTUGAL

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1. INTRODUCTION

Portugal has a surface of 89,000 square km, with a population around 10 millions inhabitants.

There are 12,000km of roads and 900km of motorways.

The total number of vehicles is slightly above 4.4 million.

Road safety measures have been enforced in order to curb the trend in accident rates that in 1996 were among the highest in Europe (13.46 accidents per 1,000 vehicles and 0.26 killed per 1,000 inhabitants).

In this paper we analyse data from the last four years.

2. ACCIDENT REGISTRATION

The road accident and injury information system is handled by Direcção Geral de Viação (Portuguese National Traffic Department) based on police reports.

3. TRENDS FOR THE PERIOD 1996 - 1999

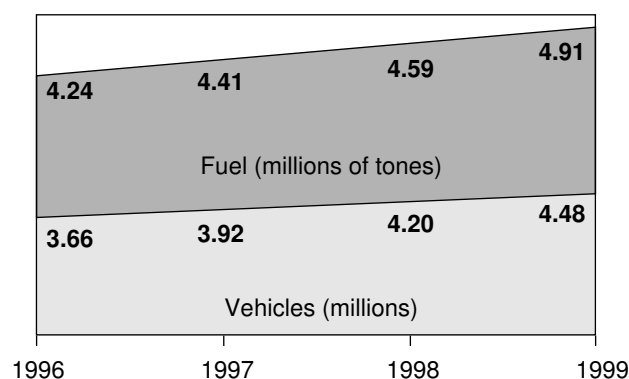


Fig. 1 Vehicles and fuel consumption

As expected, there is a parallel growth in both the number of vehicles and fuel consumption.

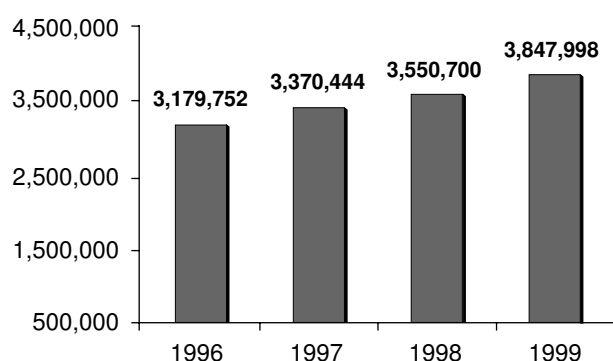


Fig. 2 Number of registered drivers

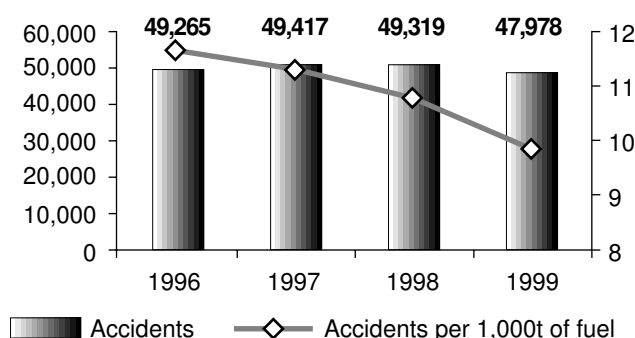


Fig. 3 Road accidents with casualties

Since the year 1997 the number of accidents has been decreasing (-1,287) and this trend is well expressed by the number of accidents with casualties per 1,000 tons of fuel consumption;

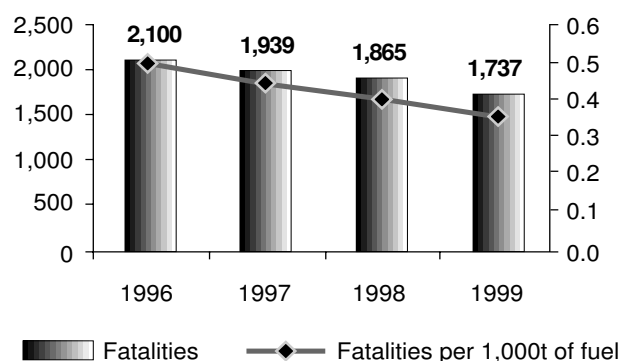


Fig. 4 Fatalities

Figure 4 shows a decrease (-363) in the number of fatalities.

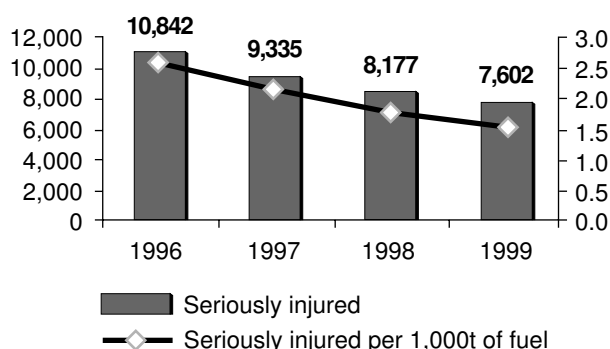


Fig. 5 Seriously injured

The number of seriously injured has been decreasing (-3,240) steadily since 1996.

4. ROAD SAFETY POLICY MEASURES

- The release of an integrated national road safety plan focused on all road users;
- Creation of local road safety councils;
- Enforcement of laws concerning speed limits, alcohol and drugs consumption;
- Financial support for improvement of road safety infrastructures at the municipality level, such as traffic calming solutions in urban areas, implementation of traffic lights, construction of sidewalks, black spots treatment;
- Improvement of medical care on the spot;
- Compulsory technical inspections of vehicles;
- Revision of the driver education system and regulations concerning driving schools, instructors, theory tests, driver training sites;
- Zero Tolerance to serious road traffic violations, speeding and drink-driving; and
- Integration of road safety education on official schools curricula.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

For the last four years (1996-1999) the total number of road accidents with fatalities or seriously injured has been decreasing, despite the increases in the numbers of vehicles (7% average per year), the number of new drivers (6.6% average per year), and fuel consumption (5% average per year). Taking into consideration these surrogate indicators of road traffic, the rate of accidents shows a significant improvement.

Such a trend has been maintained into the year 2000, according to preliminary accident data for the first six months.

As the reporting system is reliable and has been the same for years, we are led to accept that the downhill trend in the figures presented in this paper may be the result of the implementation of road safety strategies. However there are still areas where improvement is necessary and a long way to travel towards road safety.

Definitions

Accident - occurs on a public way, involves at least one moving vehicle, at least one injured or killed person and is reported by the police.

Fatality - death after a road accident and before hospitalisation; (For international comparisons with the "30 days definition" a correction factor of +14% should be applied).

Seriously injured - injured in a road accident and hospitalised for at least 24 hours.

Slightly injured - injured in a road accident and hospitalised for less than 24 hours.